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INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS 4617
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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 4879
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI 0241
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 9459
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 001871

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [UNSC](#) [MO](#) [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: A NEW BREED OF SAHARACRAT?

Classified By: Polcouns Craig Karp for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary:

¶1. (C) The Security Wali (territorial police commissioner), Bouchaib Rmili along with the Wali (governor) of Laayoune, Boujdor and Sakia al-Hamra, who arrived in Laayoune over a year ago, and the new director of the Laayoune Prison, who arrived eight months ago, appear to represent a type of more enlightened problem-solver the Rabat authorities are sending to Sahara. If their rhetoric is to be believed, and independent sources confirm some of their statements, security and prison personnel are modifying their behavior and acting in a more professional manner. All three men also seem to have instituted programs to address persistent human rights problems. End Summary.

Community Policing: From Maine to Laayoune

¶2. (C) The Security Wali, Bouchaib Rmili, (territorial police commissioner) has a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice and entered the Ministry of Interior at the unusually high rank of Commissioner in 1989. He served in several high profile postings, including as Casablanca police chief, before and after the 2003 bombings. During his tenure in Casablanca, he visited the United States on a USG program to study police procedures. In a late September meeting in his new office, he described to emboffs the community policing program he is piloting in Laayoune - a first for Morocco. It is modeled after those he saw in Maine, Washington DC and Virginia. He has also instituted in-service training for his officers in Laayoune and at the Moroccan central police academy in Kenitra focused on customer service and human rights. This step was corroborated by a United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) contact who had chance discussion with a beat cop who mentioned the training. The MINURSO contact also mentioned that members of a riot police unit, disbanded in 2006 due to widespread abuses, received retraining before being sent to other commands. This was an apparent recognition by the Government of Morocco (GOM) that the unit and its members had used excessive force and counter-productive policing methods.

They Threw First

¶3. (C) Bouchaib confirmed that the police sometimes conduct operations in schools, (a sore point with local human rights activists) but maintained that his officers only entered classrooms at the request of school officials. He added that he felt obligated to maintain a police presence outside schools because groups of students often resorted to rock throwing and other disruptive activity, an allegation we have also heard from unionist human rights activists. Bouchaib added that activists hurt their own credibility by exaggerating events and politicizing incidents as mundane traffic accidents that require police involvement, claiming the arrested individuals are political prisoners. (Comment: While such incidents may occur, they are probably over-cited by officials to devalue legitimate complaints. On December 14, well-known Sahrawi human rights activist Brahim El Ansari was arrested during a traffic stop and detained for two days. End Comment.)

Four, Maybe Five, Types of Separatists

¶4. (C) In Bouchaib's view, there are four types of separatists in Sahara:

- a) True believers, who receive instructions from the POLISARIO and manage and instigate activities in the region;
- b) Recruits, who are indoctrinated by the believers and used as foot soldiers;

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- c) Opportunists, who hide behind the mantle of separatism when caught committing crime; and
- d) Dreamers, who have not fared well under the current system and hope for a better life under the POLISARIO.
- e) Bouchaib conceded that there might be a fifth category of people who become separatists due to mistreatment by the Moroccan authorities.

A Philosophy of Proximity

¶5. (C) Bouchaib admitted that security forces have made, and continue to make, errors in treatment of prisoners and detainees, but insisted that they are making progress. He has instituted a new administrative policy to deal with police abuse complaints, and is working to improve communications with the population, including those opposed to GOM policies in Western Sahara. Bouchaib also said that he is making domestic violence a police priority in Western Sahara. He is forcing his officers out of cars and onto foot patrols to increase interaction with the population. What he termed his Philosophy of Proximity is guided by three principles; "be close to the people, respond quickly to incidents, comport well." He closed saying that "we are obligated to try new ideas to build a new Morocco."

Prison Progress As Well

¶6. (C) The new director of prisons, Abdelilah Zanfouri, who also served in high profile institutions in Morocco proper, has a degree in hotel management and appears to have brought a common sense approach to resolving long standing prisoner complaints. In response to hunger strikers' demands for better food and family visitation conditions, Zanfouri said he has improved rations and nutrition, and has instituted a

furlough program built around a good behavior. (Comment: This and some other improvements were confirmed by local prison activists and an ICRC representative during a subsequent November visit to Laayoune. End Comment.) He did not accede to prisoners' demands that up to thirty family members at a time be allowed entry per prisoner. Zanfouri welcomed the idea of a visit by emboffs to his facility, but noted that the decision rested with higher authorities.

Comment:

¶7. (C) Along with territorial Governor M'hammed Dryef, a highly experienced official dispatched last year to improve the tone in the territory, these officials have put a kinder and more open face on the Moroccan administration. It is too soon to tell whether the changes they have effected are truly institutional. Despite an acknowledgment of this new approach by Sahrawi citizens, and even by pro-POLISARIO separatist activists, the Moroccan authorities are still seen by many native Sahrawis (now an apparent minority) as occupiers. End Comment.

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